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Popular Protests and New Policies in Bolivia.

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Abstract

Social movements and popular protests have played an important role in Bolivia's recent history. In the years 2000 to 2005 social turmoil became very strong with the consequence that governments actually had to change policies, for example cancel privatisation agreements with foreign companies. Another result of the protest is that a new left-wing government won the elections in 2005. The factors behind this development are many. In the paper I will touch upon Bolivia's historical background, the effect of a majority of the population being indigenous, the economic situation in the country since the mid-eighties, new privatization *and* social reforms in the mid-nineties and the effects of the influence of foreign donor assistance on the Bolivian governments' "room for manoeuvre". Related to the latter is the growing focus internationally on indigenous people and indigenous people's rights. Social movements, especially indigenous movements, have played a crucial role in Bolivia recently time.

Bolivia's new president, Evo Morales, is by many seen as a representative of subaltern groups – the poor and the indigenous population. Morales was the leader of the coca peasant union, he is indigenous aymara and in his rhetoric in the election campaigns he has stressed this very much, arguing for the reclaiming of rights by Bolivia's majority of indigenous people.

This paper will use the coca producers' organisation as an example of a social movement, which includes elements of both old and new social movements. The element of old social movements is seen in the fact, that the organisation was formed as a union, and thus as an interest organisation of a specific class of people, the poor indigenous peasants of the lowland province of Chapare. Later the organisation has transformed and adopted elements of new social movements, organised around a specific theme: indigenous peoples' rights.

Introduction.

“People have stopped identifying themselves with the state in order to identify themselves with neighbours because they speak the same languages, or come from the same village, both of which distinguish them from others (Stavenhagen 1988: 171). This suggests a failure of modern states to create a national identity based around the state, particularly now, when due to the state’s withdrawal from active intervention in the economic sphere, it can no longer function as a benefactor” (Stolle-McAllister, 2005:132).

When discussing and analysing contemporary social movements it is generally agreed among social scientists that: “Scholars of new movements agreed that conflict among the industrial classes is of decreasing relevance, and similarly that representation of that representation of movements as largely homogenous subjects is no longer feasible” (Della Porta et al. 2006: 8). This shift from analysing social movements from conflicts within industrialism and class conflicts within a state, to an expression of other values than class based values through new social movements will be the point of departure for this paper, which will focus on the transformation of the union based coca producers organisation to a more cultural based indigenous organisation and eventually to the election of the leader of the coca producers union, Evo Morales, to president of Bolivia. As President, Morales is seen as a representative of the indigenous population and his administration is expected to change current Bolivia to a more multi cultural society stressing the country’s indigenous background and heritage.

Background:

The majority of the Bolivian population is indigenous¹. Due to marginalisation and racism (Urban & Sherzer, 1991, Van Cott, 2005), indigenous people have historically had almost no political power in the Bolivian society. After the revolution in 1952, where the MNR (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario) came to power, the unions have played an important role in Bolivian society, especially the union for the workers in the mines gained strong political influence. Traditionally the larger part of the Bolivian population has inhabited the high plateau – the “Altiplano”, which is situated in between two Andean mountain ranges. The reason why a larger part of the population has lived here is displacement due to different “invasions” of their original territories since the times of the Incas. The more systematic displacements of the indigenous population was initiated by

¹ . Indigenous people are the original inhabitants of Latin America. Around 65% of the Bolivia population are indigenous (Van Cott, 1994)

the Spanish conquerors in their “reducciones”, where the Spanish colonial administration moved people away from their traditional villages, organised in ayllus², and into towns located around newly established haciendas, which were in need of workers. Many indigenous people thus became landless slave workers on the big haciendas owned by the Spanish conquerors and their descendants. The ayllus used to have territory in different ecological zones but now this was split up. Having plots of land in the high plateau, the valleys and the tropical lowlands, secured the members of the ayllus many different products: potatoes and quinoa³ from the high plateau, wheat, cotton and corn from the valleys and tropical fruits from the lowlands. The ayllus persisted after the reducciones, but now they were only having territory at the altiplano, which excluded them from growing the diverse products in the different ecological zones, and also it altered the social organisation, which was tying together the extended ayllu. Nevertheless the social organisation connected to the technology of cultivating the land commonly in the high plateau persisted. A large part of the indigenous population continued to live in the altiplano while other parts of the lower areas of Bolivia were sparsely populated. Being members of a social organisation also strengthened the indigenous population internally, and organising and uniting has been a trend in the Bolivian social movements over the centuries.

After the 1952 revolution organising in unions became common since to be granted a piece of land after the land reform, a person had to be member of the peasant union. In the cities workers formed unions and the mine worker union gained great power within the central workers union, COB (Central Obrera Boliviana). This power diminished after 1982 when Bolivia’s economic problems increased due to a fall of tin prices on the world market. Tin was Bolivia’s main export good. In 1985 then President Paz Estensorro introduced law number 21060 (structural adjustment program). This opened the process of the neo liberal structural adjustment policies. The objective of the law was to stop inflation, which was accomplished, but the law was a blow to social organisations and unions, depriving these of influence in Bolivian society by privatizing state-owned industries. Before 1985, the Bolivian unions were very strong and the State provided at least 60% of the country’s employment. Among the state-owned industries were petroleum, telecommunications, airlines, railroads and mines. The mining sector was very important, and four mines produced 25

² Ayllus are social organisations related to cultivation of land

³ Quinoa is a special and very nutritious type of plant which provides the Andean population with grains for multiple purposes.

percent of the states' total revenue⁴. Many of these industries have been privatized, others have been closed down due to economic crisis, and the unions have lost their importance and strength.

With the economic collapse of especially the tin industry in the beginning of the 1980's the mining industry lost its importance for Bolivian economy, and the mine workers were fired. This initiated massive migration to the lower areas of Bolivia began. Many mine workers moved to Chapare, the tropical western part of Bolivia. In Chapare many of them settled as coca farmers.

The US led "war on drugs" in Bolivia, which includes eradication of coca plants and fields, has led to decrease in drug money – including the money which small scale peasants received by selling the coca leaves – and thereby an increase in the dependency on foreign aid and support from international financing institutions like the World Bank and other donors. The "war against drugs" initiated by the Bolivian government helped by the US has created social instability in Bolivia for decades, and is a consequence of poor farmers growing coca as a cash crop in order for them and their families to survive. In fact the coca production has also increased income for Bolivia⁵. The coca leaf is a plant, which has been used traditionally for centuries by the indigenous people in the Andean region. Therefore the protests against the war on drugs also have cultural connotations since the coca leaf is part of many indigenous people's traditions and culture.

Indigenous People and indigenous rights

Indigenous people in Bolivia are slowly gaining rights to land as indigenous people. They are granted land rights if they can prove that they have been there since before conquest. In many cases they actually can do that, since the colonial administration was registering a lot of conflicts over land during the colonial period, and these documents still exist. In some ayllus they also have kept documents for 300 years or more, and are now using them to obtain the right to their ancestral – as they claim it to be – land.

Additionally this stressing culture and right of land connected to the status of being *indigenous*, has also created some new strategies to the focus on culture. Since obtaining land rights, according to the INRA land reform, in most of Bolivia's rural areas today increasingly are being connected to a status of being indigenous, some of the inhabitants of the rural areas, who for the last 50 years have

⁴ Multinational Monitor, 2000

⁵ As former president Quiroga says: "Drugs, illegal as they may be, they were 3% of the GDP, 18 % of the exports. Bad as it was, damaging as it was, if you look at it from a purely business standpoint... it [the drug trade] was Milton Friedman heaven: all privately run, no taxation, no regulation, and in essence – if you want to look at it cynically – duty free access to markets" (Frontline world, 2002b)

been small farmers owning their own very small piece of land⁶, are returning to acknowledging their indigenous past and want to alter the individual ownership to land to collective ownership to territories.

After 1952 and until 1985, when neoliberal policies were introduced, the farmers union was very strong in some parts of the Andean area, and the small peasants were organised in these unions. The union fought a socialist class struggle against the Bolivian state. In this discourse there was no room for enhancing anything “indigenous” and part of the rural population were redefining themselves as “campesinos”. Today the discourse is changing again. The campesinos now see an opportunity for bettering their life by “returning” to a more indigenous mode of organisation in recreating the ayllus of their area, re-establishing the social organisation and reclaiming collective ownership to land. As a consequence a lot of discussion is going on in Bolivia about who are indigenous, and who are not. Interestingly being indigenous in this case does not have so much to do with “culture and tradition”, but with obtaining land rights. “Culture” can in this case be seen as a practice, as a political instrument in the fight for land rights.

Political Parties

In Bolivia the post 1952 state has tried to create national stability and identity through class-based rhetoric of the people being represented by the government, especially during the administrations of the MNR (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario) governments. MNR was having a leading role in the 1952 revolution, and it created unions for different sectors throughout Bolivia. The mine workers union was especially strong within the COB (central obrero boliviano), which also included the CSUTCB – the farmers union. Class based social movements have thus been strong in Bolivia. At some point these movements have been almost co-opted by the state (MNR). At the same time these movements have protested vigorously against elite policies performed by elite politicians and governments. Many of these protests have taken the form of marches in the streets and blocking roads. Political parties in Bolivia, as in many other Latin American countries have not had the political will after all to change society. More often the parties have been a main factor in maintaining inequalities and unjust social order, since political parties have been famous for being sustaining corruption, for example by supporting the practises of “Peguismo (pega being slang for job) or cuoteo (with each party enjoying its “cuota” of power)” (Crabtree, 2005:11). This way the

⁶ Due to land distribution in 1953, where landless peasants received plots of land on former haciendas

parties did not represent different social sectors of society, but where tools for the elected to maximise power and money through political agreements and corruption which was eased by the habit of parties in power gaining most on their own behalf and not on the behalf of their voters. The elitist party system has been challenged both by protesters and by new parties. Protests in La Paz in 2003 forced the then president, Gonzalez Sanchez de Lozada, to step down from office and flee the country. His successor, Carlos Mesa, had some support among the people, but was later forced to step down as well.

In 2002 two new parties were represented in congress, the “Movimiento al socialismo (MAS: Movement towards socialism) and “Movimiento Indígena Pachakuti” (MIP: Pachakuti Indigenous Movement). These two parties were different because the representatives of Mas (Morales) was the leader of the coca leaf producers union, and the leader of MIP was the aymara nationalist Felipe Quispe. They both represented the indigenous parts of the population.

New reforms in Bolivia

In the mid-1990's the government of Gonzalez Sanchez de Lozada introduced reforms on popular participation, agriculture/land, education and decentralization. These reforms were meant to include the indigenous population in the state on their terms: the indigenous population was recognized as *indigenous* for the first time⁷. The policies of changing governments had hitherto been aimed at trying to assimilate and “civilize” the indigenous population to be *Bolivian* citizens. Now the State changed its rhetoric (and constitution) acknowledging, that Bolivia is a pluri national and multi cultural society, allowing for the first time that the indigenous population gained some self-determination by recognising their social organisations. This change came at the same time as the international awareness on indigenous people increased partly spurred by the initiation of the decade of indigenous people under UN and the creation of the “UN Forum on Indigenous Issues”⁸. But also in societies in the West, there was a growing interest in rights and especially, indigenous rights.⁹

The increased focus on indigenous people and indigenous peoples' rights was also part of many countries' donor policies. Since Bolivia is dependent on foreign aid, the government has to comply with the policies favoured by the donors. Human Rights are important in the discourse of development, and receiving countries' policies have to correspond to the human rights declaration.

⁷ Andersson, 1999

⁸ <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>

⁹ Henriksen, 2001

This means granting rights to subaltern groups, among these indigenous people. Donors are thus influencing the Bolivian government policies, and the reforms of the mid-nineties were in accordance with donor policies. But there has also been a pressure from social and indigenous organisations to change policies in Bolivia¹⁰. One of the results of the wishes for change has been the election of Evo Morales as president. Evo Morales is aymara¹¹, former llama herder and coca leaf grower, and he has been active in the coca peasants' union for many years. Evo Morales was a representative of IPSP (Instrumento Politico para la Soberanía de los Pueblos (Political instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples)). Due to the centralization of the political system in Bolivia, the formation of new parties is difficult. "In Bolivia political elites designed institutional rules with the intention of containing persistent party system fragmentation and to defend their space in the political system against challenger parties that emerged in the 1990's" (Van Cott, 2005:24). The IPSP was offered to run for election on the small socialist party MAS' list (MAS: Movimiento al Socialismo). Evo Morales had won constituency in the Chapare region and was elected a member of parliament on votes mainly from Chapare coca peasants, but the party MAS gained large popular support in 2005, also outside the Chapare region.

New social movements

"Democracy on a global scale is becoming an increasingly widespread demand, sometimes explicit, but often implicit in the innumerable grievances and resistances expressed against the current global order. The common currency that runs throughout so many struggles and movements for liberation across the world today – at local, regional and global levels – is the desire for democracy. Needless to say, desiring and demanding global democracy do not guarantee its realization, but we should not underestimate the power such demands can have" (Hardt & Negri, 2005:xvi).

This fight for democracy has very much been an underlying issue in the past 20 years manifestations and protests voiced by especially the indigenous population in Bolivia. Fights for democracy can take various directions: Either working inside the existing parliamentary system or taking to the streets demanding a new way of doing things.

Evo Morales can be said to have done both. He has recently stressed his being a representative of the indigenous population and he has worked within the frames of Bolivian parliamentary system in

¹⁰ "The discourse of rights is particularly attractive for excluded groups seeking to justify their inclusion" (Foweraker & Landman, 1997: 228, quoted from Van Cott, 2005:41)

¹¹ One of the larger indigenous groups in Bolivia

that he has listed as candidate on an existing party's list- the MAS. This is the only way to gain a seat in the parliament. Nevertheless: "The right to vote does not necessarily ensure democracy as such. Political parties can monopolize political processes in an un-democratic way. Voting is frequently seen as a capitulation to a centralized system that shows only contempt for local needs and desires" (Stolle- McAllister 2005:6)

Electoral promises are often made with no intention of keeping them after the election and parties are corrupted. This has weakened the confidence in the old political parties in Bolivia (Crabtree, 2005: 9).

Evo Morales was elected as leader of the coca-leaf farmers before his election to president. As a leader of the union he has stressed class discourse when fighting for coca leaf producers' rights. This fight was mostly directed against the US supported coca plant eradication programs in the Chapare region in Eastern Bolivia.

Traditionally the indigenous people in Bolivia have been growing coca for centuries. Coca has been used for herbal medicine, as a part of rituals (Allen, 1988) and is chewed to avoid altitude sickness and fatigue. Coca has been cultivated mostly in the Yungas Region in Northern Bolivia. After a collapse in tin-prices and thereby mass- dismissals in the mining areas, many former miners migrated to the tropical Chapare, and started to grow coca as a cash-crop (Jeppesen, 2004). Coca is fairly easy to grow and easy to sell. The reason why the US. government has supported the Bolivian government in their coca plant eradication strategy, has been their allegation that most of the coca grown in Chapare has been sold to the illegal cocaine industry. Evo Morales, on the other hand, has stressed the cultural importance of coca and its importance for indigenous culture and tradition.

As a union leader his rhetoric has been definitive, but after being elected as president he has softened it some, now declaring "yes to coca, no to cocaine". How he will achieve this is somewhat unclear. Being tied to coca-leaf production, the coca peasant union has played on two strings in its organisation and political project. One being the classbased rhetoric of a social movement linking its fight to the class based society and organising within this. The other string has being the cultural one. He has been linking the coca-leaf production to Bolivian culture and traditions and this way arguing for the right to grow coca, despite the fact that Bolivian governments and US administrations have declared the coca-leaf production in Chapare illegal. One can see a development in the coca-leaf farmers union from the rhetoric of the "old" social movements towards the rhetoric of the "new" social movements. Swinging from obtaining rights on a class based focus on division of wealth to focusing on indigenous people and their rights - for example

the right to grow coca as indigenous people – in line with the growing of coca in the legal areas of Yungas.

New social movements put emphasis upon “issues of identity, ideology and culture, issues of social integration and social and cultural reproduction, rather than upon the material issues around production and distribution that had been seen as the bread and butter of class conflict in capitalist societies” (Mayo, 2005: 62)

Hybridity

The policies of the coca-leaf producers and their leaders can be explained by the notion of “hybridity”: “Constant articulation of differing cultural discourses [...]. This has been quite evident in the practices of these movements in which local, national and trans-national, non-modern and modern are continually interwoven” (Stolle-McAllister, 2005:28). Even though the notion of hybridity could further lack of difference (if everybody tries to “link” to others in a hybrid way – where is then the difference between groups after some time?), it can on the other hand be used to analyse social movements which change over time. For example the members of coca-leaf producers’ organisation who are themselves indigenous people. At one time in history they “use” the class based discourse and form an old social movement, which gradually transfer to a new social movement putting emphasis on the indigeneity instead of class struggle, but still representing the same people and their interests. Stressing the indigenous cultural identity is a common trend throughout Latin America today. Due to the growing Indian rights mobilization an increase in ethnic identification and cultural pride is taking place (Brysk, 2000).

Regarding the notion of hybridity, activists often claim that their struggle is concentrated on a certain issue and “reality” only relevant for their own particular situation. In Bolivia the fights for indigenous rights could be one example, and here in particular the fight for rights to land. Although this fight may seem very “local”, where opponents like hacienda owner and other large landowners also have an interest in the land – or in the jungle areas where settlers and large timber companies also claim the land. This “local” fight for land is not only local, but is connected to the national and international levels in many ways. Thus the fight gets “simultaneously local, global and national, which is reflected in their seemingly contradictory demands both for autonomy and for greater inclusion.” (Stolle-McAllister, 2005:7). In Bolivia this wish for both autonomy and greater inclusion by the indigenous people can take new forms given the fact that even though the

indigenous population in relation to power has been a minority, in numbers they form the majority of the Bolivian population. Formerly the articulation of the indigenous social movements has been within class discourse. Now cultural articulation has “switched” to stressing the indigenous past and rights of indigenous people.

This can be exemplified with the inauguration ceremony, when the new Bolivian president, Evo Morales, was sworn in. The ceremony took place at Tihuanaco, an ancient temple situated at the altiplano close to the Titicaca Lake. Evo Morales was there as a representative of the indigenous people. He was elected on the list of MAS, but class rhetoric was almost absent on that day.

Morales was sworn in by a number of Mallku's and Kurakas – traditional indigenous leaders, as well as by indigenous priests. Morales was denominated “Apumallku” (the highest authority among indigenous people) by the indigenous leaders and said:

“I only want to tell you, from this sacred place, that with the help of our brothers and sisters quechuas, aymaras, guaraníes, we will show how to govern with dignity and responsibility in order to change the economic situation for the Bolivian people”¹²

This wish to govern with “honesty and responsibility” is opposed to what has been seen as an elitist rule initiated after the creation of the republic in 1825:

“The indigenous people have been marginalised with the foundation of Bolivia in 1825, therefore the indigenous people will now claim the right to recreate Bolivia”¹³

Morales' discourse at the inauguration ceremony thus very much stressed the cultural aspect of Bolivia being a country with a majority of indigenous people, and him being elected as a representative of this population. The class based discourse of the union and the union's fight for better distribution of wealth in the Bolivian society was toned down.

¹² “Solo quiero decirles, desde este lugar sagrado, que con ayuda de ustedes hermanos y hermanas, quechuas, aymaras, guaraníes, queremos enseñar a gobernar con honestidad y con responsabilidad, para cambiar la situación económica del pueblo boliviano” (La Razon, 22/1, 2006).

¹³ “Se marginó la participación de los pueblos indígenas originarios en la fundación de Bolivia en el año 1825, por eso los pueblos indígenas originarios reclaman refundar Bolivia.” (La Razon, 22/1 2006).

Hybridity as the constant articulation of different cultural discourses can thus be seen in the emphasis laid on the cultural/indigenous aspect.

Social movements in Latin America and within the UN.

Habermas has argued that the new conflicts are not related to distribution problems but are rather related to way of life – how one defines oneself. This has been expressed in the sentence “the personal is political”, which was one of the feminist movements’ key lines. (Habermas in Mayo, 2005:62). Class politics have thus been challenged and new identities, no longer dependent on the industrial class society, but rather on the post modern society have been formed. One can see the development in social movements in this light: transforming from class based organisations challenging distribution towards identity based movements focused on realisation of a particular way of life. This is also linked to “survival” in a country like Bolivia, where the income distribution is very unequally divided.

Social movements give social groups in society a voice, which is often not heard otherwise. It includes direct participation in a form, which other organisations in society do not provide. For example many new social moments focus on local control over cultural and natural resources (Stolle-McAllister, 2005:24).

Many Latin American countries have witnessed social outcries during the last 10 years. Social and ethnic movements have gradually gained power in Latin America (Van Cott, 2005). One example is the Zapatistas in Mexico, who after years of social struggle now is transforming to a political organisation, trying to gain power through the political system. The new, highly politicized social and ethnic movements in Latin America can be seen as a response to the many years of neoliberal policies lead by authoritarian governments. The decline in bureaucratic authoritarianism and increasing implementation of democratisation and decentralisation policies in a number of countries (among these are Bolivia), have helped the formation of a new arena for social struggle within the civil society, which contest traditional power structures (Vanden, 2003). New social and political movements have been formed to take the fight for social justice in poor Latin American countries. In Bolivia the protests have been a mixture of indigenous peoples’ fight for rights and poor peoples’ fight against neoliberal policies.

In the 70’s an international indigenous movement in Latin America emerged slowly by way of different international conferences held by church organisations and NGO’s, which gathered

indigenous groups from both North and South America. A key concept for indigenous groups is, as mentioned before: *Self-determination*.

There are two main reasons for this: Self determination has a basis in international law, where indigenous groups can define themselves as peoples, and thus claim to be protected by UN conventions (Della Porta, 1999). Another reason is that self-determination stresses the indigenous groups *own* definitions of who they are as a group inside and different from the nation state. They do not wish to be seen as minorities, who normally are seen as groups, which eventually will be assimilated into the majority society or culture.

The self definition as “peoples” is contested inside and outside the UN system. The question is whether it relates to “indigenous peoples” as well. Since indigenous people are groups with cultural, linguistic and historical ties to the territories they inhabit, they could be recognised as peoples according to UN standards. But the UN consists of nation-states, which are not willing to give too many rights to “their own” groups of indigenous people, since this would endanger the stability of the nation-state (Van Cott, 1994). The nation-state in most postcolonial areas are, after all, arbitrary entities, where the borderlines were drawn according to power relations in the colonising states, and not according to the structures of indigenous societies, which already inhabited the areas. Therefore we see in Latin America and other parts of the third world today, members of the same ethnic groups living in different countries.

Even though indigenous people are still struggling to be recognised as “peoples” in the UN formulation, they have gained results internationally: The convention 169 of the ILO is very important for the indigenous groups, when talking about international recognition. Furthermore the UN decade of indigenous peoples (1993-2004, renewed in 2005) has had its impact.

The Human Rights Regime is another supporter of indigenous rights¹⁴. Brysk (1994) presents the argument of the “international regime approach” as a useful instrument to use in understanding indigenous groups on the global scene. Especially the strategic use of information networks is useful for the indigenous groups or movements - the Zapatista movement in Chiapas was spreading news on the internet to the global civil society.

The indigenous people have begun to make use of international arenas, or regimes, because the national governments in the states they inhabit have been opposing the demands that the indigenous

¹⁴ I define a regime as a “set of rules, which govern state action in particular areas”. Jackson and Sørensen: Introduction to International Relations, 1999.

groups have posed regarding rights to living their life according to culture and traditions, and here especially rights to the use of land and resources. (Brysk, 1994: 33ff)

One of the places, where indigenous people's movements have tried to influence issues dealt with and decisions taken, is within the UN system, as mentioned before. The presence of political authority on international level and the existence of supranational power centres, such as the European Community and the United Nations offer new political opportunities and make way for globalisation of political protest. Through history, social movements have protested to different levels of authority. Before the creation of the nation-state in Europe, social movements had to address their action on the local level to local authorities. One can hardly call these groups of discontented groups of for example peasants or merchants for social movements, as we know them today. It is not until the creation of a national level, that social movements gain influence. They organise within a nation-state on a national level, and thus are bigger and expressing more people's discontent. This shift to national collective action transformed to international collective action with the creation of supra-national organisations, like the UN.

The organisation of the UN has allowed other actors than states to take part in its work, but with a different position, since only member states have the right to vote. Even so, and especially since the Rio conference, 1992, the number of social movements organisations allowed to participate in UN activities have grown. In the case of indigenous people's movements, they have been challenging the nation-state for years concerning local matters of resistance against invaders who have claimed their territories and tried to change their culture and way of life. The indigenous people have through history put up resistance against this, first by armed conflict with the invaders, next by trying to negotiate with the local bosses. At the end of the 19th century the indigenous issue reached the national level. Indigenous people began to address their demands to the governments. But due to lack of results on this national level, the indigenous people have more recently addressed their demands to international organisations, hoping that this would help them in their fight against the national governments and local bosses, since governments are compelled by for example UN conventions and declarations.

The UN elaborates normative rules (Passy, 1999). The UN is thus an important actor for the indigenous people's organisations to deal with in order to obtain rights globally and within the nation state, in which they live. One major role for the UN is to create a forum, where: "Nation-states can build an international regime, that is, governing arrangements that affect every participant

in the negotiation by creating norms and procedures that regularize their behaviour on specific arenas”(Della Porta (ed.): 1999:151).

This normative role of the UN is very important to the indigenous groups, since UN is not only an assembly of nation states. It is also a centre, where organised groups from civil society can address their demands and challenge decisions. The UN has from the beginning been open to social movements’ organisations. This is stated in the article 71. The UN realised from the beginning the importance of collaborating with actors from civil society, especially within the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Different groups can make oral and written statements during the meetings at different levels, but they cannot vote. And only trans-national social movements can participate and be granted consultative status.

“In the Indigenous peoples’ area, human rights and indigenous peoples’ organisations have taken on an increasingly important role within the UN, as their number grows year by year and, above all, as they play a more active role. Since the start of the negotiations on the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, they have influenced the Declaration by drafting it, in collaboration with the UN administration, though the process is very slow.”(Della Porta, 1999:157).

Conclusion

The growing importance of indigenous issues in Bolivia and the protests against neo liberal policies seem now to be parallel processes. Both processes build on the strong tradition in Bolivia for organisation and social protest, and can not always be held apart. The election of Evo Morales is at the moment the strongest example of the two processes uniting in one political project of securing indigenous people influence on government policies and controlling former neo liberal policies initiated by former governments and redirecting these policies towards new goals.

People in Cochabamba fighting for the right to clean and affordable water supplies and indigenous groups marching and demonstrating for the right to growing coca legally are two parallel trends in contemporary Bolivia. They both are related to fight for rights, and they both contest the human rights regime and the contents and limits of human rights. Is access to water a human right? Do indigenous people have a claim on special rights? These are questions which are constantly contested and discussed within the UN, in nation-states and in different social organisations and movements.

The way these issues are discussed lay within the content of the notion of hybridity: “constant articulation of differing cultural discourses”. The organisation and the discourse of the social movements shifts according to the political “reality”. Right now indigenous social movements in Bolivia focus on indigenous rights located in the “international human rights regime”. This is used in the fights for rights at the local levels.

The president of Bolivia sees himself as a representative of the indigenous people. He himself has changed his discourse from the class based discourse when he was leader of the coca leaf-producers union in Chapare to a discourse focussing more on indigenous people and their rights as indigenous. This implies a general shift in social movements in Bolivia from class based social movements to “new social movements” focussing on “identity, ideology and culture” (Mayo, 2005), in Bolivia based on *indigenous* identity, ideology and culture.

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